

The S4 Study Method

Simplify · Synthesize · Self-Study · Study Buddy



Practice like it's test day.

From Dr. Nakata's Holistic Learning Course · Achieve Education

A free guide for medical and health-professions students.

A note from Dr. Nakata

One exam is not the whole story.

Med school is like drinking from a fire hose.

I failed my first year of medical school. I was working hard, but no one had taught me how to learn. I needed a way to handle the material and practice using it.

When a result knocks you down, adding more hours isn't the only move. Look at your method: how do you turn a lecture into something you can recall?

Start with one course. Use the four steps to build your study material, practice recall, and rehearse with a real classmate.

Dr. Nakata

The S4 method is taught in HOLC lesson 20 and the AI Study Workflow.

The four moves

The S4 map

BUILD**S1 • Simplify**

Break down concepts in your own words.

**S2 • Synthesize**

Chunk into 3–5 key points or mnemonics.

**PRACTICE****S3 • Self-Study**

Use flashcards and practice recall.

**S4 • Study Buddy**

Teach and reinforce with a real classmate.

Skate to where the puck is going to be

Wayne Gretzky · as quoted in the HOLC workbook

The first two steps used to take me hours, just to make a study sheet. Now AI makes your study sheet in minutes instead of hours, so you don't waste your time and get to the self-study and study buddy steps sooner.

The course's workflow thesis: AI speeds preparation. You still do the learning and the recall practice.

BUILD • S1

Simplify



The information in lecture is the road map of the test. It's just encrypted in medical terms.

Turn all definitions, concepts, graphs that the teacher puts on the board into its simplest terms. Teachers use big words, so don't just copy the board. What the teacher is covering in the lecture will be on the test.

Capture the lecture

Where recording is permitted, record the lecture in Evernote and create a transcript, so you can spend class deciding what matters.

How Dr. Nakata takes notes

In Microsoft OneNote, which lets you draw and type: (1) import the lecture slides; (2) annotate them, drawing lines to what the teacher highlights; (3) actively make flashcards during the lecture; (4) repeat. If a picture is important, expect to see it again on the test, asking you to identify a structure.

One concept I can explain in simpler words

Course deck p247–252 • Lesson 20 • AI Study Workflow §2

BUILD • S2

Synthesize



Your goal during class time is to start synthesizing the information into something you can remember. Chunk it into **3–5 key points**. Make it a mnemonic, song, acronym or story.

Flashcard-style notes: a two-column table, with the question on the left and the answer on the right. **NotebookLM** only uses your sources; the course's **Study Material GPT** turns photos of your notes into a study sheet.

FLASHCARDS (then import into Quizlet)

Based on these class notes, create flashcards with a question on one side and an answer on the other. Keep the answers concise and easy to review.

PATHWAY / FLOWCHART

Can you help me organize this process into a step-by-step pathway or flowchart, starting from the initial step and ending with the outcome?

MNEMONIC

Take this list or concept and turn it into a fun or memorable mnemonic to help me recall it more easily.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Using this material, can you create 5 multiple-choice practice questions with explanations for each correct answer?

Always check AI-made material against your course sources. Never upload patient information or anything confidential.

Course deck p250–259 • Lessons 20, 23 • AI Study Workflow §3

Between the reps

Brain breaks and focus



Brain Break = Mind Reset + Focus Recharge.

Class is ~50 minutes followed by a 10-minute break. It's a built-in work-rest rhythm that boosts focus and recovery. Don't sit and wait, or you'll lose your focus. Do some type of physical movement, and avoid screens and stimulation.

Move

Stretch or take a walk.

Pause

Breathe deeply.

Refuel

Drink water or eat a snack.

Reset

Listen to calming music.

During self-study

My Pomodoro is 45 minutes studying, a 10-minute brain break and 5 minutes of slack.
The classic Pomodoro is 25 minutes on, 5 off.

My next brain break

Course deck p255–256, p263 · Lesson 20

PRACTICE • S3

Self-Study



Your goal is to practice recall, not finding the information again. Right after class, the information is the freshest: do a **15–25 minute mini self-study** to organize your flashcards and practice questions.

Spaced repetition: see it five times

(1) In lecture → (2) the afternoon after lecture → (3) that weekend → (4) with your study buddy → (5) the morning of the test. The more frequent you recall the memory the more likely it is to stick in your long term memory.

How Dr. Nakata self-studies

Go through the flashcards once. Review what you missed. Grow your mastered stack one card at a time. Take a brain break. Repeat until the end of the day. I used to study for multiple hours straight. Problem: focus wanes and the info didn't stick.

Study Buddy GPT: try Quiz Me, a fictional case simulation, or teach-back, and check every answer against your course sources. Practice beats rereading. Keep private details out.

Can you teach it back?

Course deck p257, p262–264 • Lessons 20, 23 • AI Study Workflow §4

PRACTICE • S4

Study Buddy



Find someone in your class that wants to practice. Practice the night before with another person, **out loud**: quiz each other, run fictional cases, and simulate the exam. Oral recall is the strongest method for memory retention.

Reinforcement through teaching

Explaining it to someone else shows you what you really know.

Motivation and accountability

You show up because someone is counting on you.

Spot gaps in understanding

Your buddy hears what you skipped.

A zero-risk test drive

Designed to find your blind spots and fix them before the real race.

If every rep before the test already felt like test day, then test day is just one more rep.

Course deck p248, p295–296 • AI Study Workflow §5

After a setback

The Test Track



Practice your recall before the big day.

The reason why it was hard to memorize in the first place is because it was not simple enough.

1 **Gather your problem topics.**

Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. Make two stacks, mastered and problem topics, and work on the stack of problem flashcards, concepts and pathways.

2 **Re-attempt to simplify.**

Use AI to come up with ideas to simplify the idea again. Ask your study buddy how they think about the concept, and ask your coach or professor how they approach it. Check the explanation against your course sources.

3 **Then practice the recall.**

Use spaced repetition with the time you have left. Vary the tone of your voice, high and low, when you recall it out loud to yourself.

4 **Practice questions.**

Use AI to make practice questions, or a question bank. Practice pacing at about 1 minute 30 seconds per question, and follow your actual exam's timing when you simulate it.

Course deck p282–293 · Lessons 20, 23 · AI Study Workflow §4–5.

Your one-week restart

Practice like it's test day

Dr. Nakata learned this from the story of Michael Phelps. In the 2008 Olympic 200 m butterfly final, his goggles filled with water and he was essentially blind underwater. It didn't matter: he had trained every day as if it was race day, and knew exactly how many kicks, strokes and breaths he needed to reach the finish. He visualized the race before bed every night. When the real thing comes, you don't have to think; you perform the way you practiced.

Pick one course

Day	S1	S2	S3	S4
1	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	☐	☐	☐	☐

Problem stack count · Start of week: _____ End of week: _____

What was one weak concept you struggled with today? Did re-simplifying and synthesizing help you recall it better?

If you don't have a study buddy yet, who could you ask to team up with?

If it was a struggle that is ok. You just identified the area to work on.

Workbook p124–125, p144, p158 · Phelps account: public race reporting (see sources).

Keep practicing

Sources & next step

Dr. Nakata's Holistic Learning Course. Driver M.A.P., Consistent Routines and Your AI Study Tools (lessons 17, 20, 23). Course deck *Stress Ki Pathways* (8-12-25) p234–297; workbook p124–158.

The AI Study Workflow. HOLC S4 framework and podcast script, §1–5: capture, build, practice alone, then practice with a classmate.

Francesco Cirillo. *The Pomodoro Technique*.

Dunlosky et al. (2013), *Improving Students' Learning With Effective Learning Techniques*.

Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 14(1), 4–58. A review supporting practice testing and distributed practice; it does not test this complete S4 guide.

Michael Phelps, 2012 Olympic Trials interview. Stroke-control training and the Beijing 2008 race; also **Olympedia's race account**.

Tools named as examples: Evernote, Microsoft OneNote, NotebookLM and ChatGPT custom GPTs. No endorsement is claimed.

Take your next step

Try 3 free lessons

About the course

Ask about coaching with Dr. Nakata

This guide is education, not medical or mental-health care. If you're struggling to cope, please reach out to a professional or a crisis line first.